



Making Tech Work for Teachers



As new technology shows the potential to alter or even render obsolete the traditional classroom, teachers are looking for the proper balance between new ways of teaching and what's worked well in the past.

Holly Rocchetti teaches fifth-graders at the Mount Vernon Community School in Alexandria, Virginia. She began teaching six years ago in a classroom whose books, desks and chalkboard were similar to the classrooms she was taught in as a child.

Blending Technology and Tradition

In many ways, her current classroom is like those of her childhood, too: signs in brightly

colored construction paper on the walls and shelves of books in a reading corner. But in addition to those familiar elements, there's also a large Smart Board connected to a document reader at the front of the room, a cart of netbook computers and even a couple of iPads.

Sometimes these tools are a convenient replacement for older teaching tools that served the same purpose. The document reader allows her to display handwritten student work on the large screen as she would with an overhead projector, but without the need for transparencies. The Smart Board functions as a large touch screen at which the teacher and students can do everything they could with a chalkboard and much more.

Rocchetti admits that these tools she depends on now were more of an enemy when she first encountered them. "I slowly worked my

way into it," she said. "It was definitely terrifying. I didn't really know how to change my teaching to incorporate this thing."

"I worried about the time and prepping for it," said Rocchetti, "but I was excited because the kids get really engaged with it."

Rocchetti has found the technology tools of her classroom to be especially helpful with math and science. "[They're] great for ... having them move the shapes,

Fifth-grade teacher Holly Rocchetti, left, and one of her students work together on a tablet computer at the Mount Vernon Community School in Alexandria, Virginia.



Top: This iPad is being used in a classroom by a student at Center Grove Elementary School in Greenwood, Indiana. The school received a \$200,000 grant from the Indiana Department of Education to purchase 230 iPads and Nook E-readers and to create an online library for its students to use.

move the numbers, actually do the calculations.”

And in science, she appreciates the ability to use resources from the Internet, “being able to show bigger pictures, being able to find a picture of a cell, as opposed to only having their textbook where the pictures are smaller. We can watch a video of a cell going through mitosis.”

The Best of the Old

Does she use the new tools of technology in all of her teaching? No. In Rocchetti’s opinion, some learning is best done with older technology. “I think there’s nothing like having them curl up on the floor with an actual book. All of my kids are reading actual books that they can put their hands on.”

As helpful as she finds these 21st-century tools, she encourages students to do simple math problems with pencil and paper because that is how they’d be likely to do them



Two children use iPads to work on academic skills in their classroom at Center Grove Elementary School in Greenwood, Indiana.

outside the classroom. Conversely, she encourages them to become comfortable reading on a computer screen, since that is how they will have to take an increasing number of the achievement tests required to advance academically.

Rocchetti feels she’s been able to spark her students’ interest in learning with tools that weren’t available to the teachers she had when she was her students’ age. Recently,

her class interviewed another class of fifth-graders hundreds of miles away in New Jersey for a social studies lesson with the help of video-conferencing software.

“When I think about fifth grade,” she said, “we sat in rows. We didn’t work together. It was very independent, with a lot of rote memorization. I definitely think this is a lot more engaging.”

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